



Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
30 November 2010

Original: English

Commission on the Status of Women

Fifty-fifth session

22 February-4 March 2011

Item 3 (a) of the provisional agenda*

Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century": implementation of strategic objectives and action in critical areas of concern and further actions and initiatives

Statement submitted by International Presentation Association of the Sisters of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* E/CN.6/2011/L.

Statement

1. The advancement of women and girls is one of the areas of concern of the International Presentation Association of the Sisters of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary in 22 countries, both of the South and the North. Taking into consideration that the review theme of the fifty-fifth session of the Commission on the Status of Women is the elimination of all forms of discrimination and violence against the girl child, one of the adopted agreed conclusions of the Commission at its fifty-first session,¹ this statement presents the voices from group discussions with the participation of more than 400 women and girls, held in Australia, India, Peru and Zambia. The statement depicts stories of effective practices and implementation gaps in the framework of the agreed conclusions, in both urban cities and rural villages, and contains some of the recommendations formulated by women and girls.

Effective practices

2. Considerable efforts have been made to meet the target of eliminating gender inequalities in primary and secondary education, by making education compulsory and free for all. Incentives, such as: introducing a midday meal scheme in schools providing free lunch to students on all working days in the hope of protecting them from classroom hunger and malnutrition; increasing school enrolment and attendance; improving socialization among children of all walks of life to reduce discrimination; ensuring safe and supportive school environments for girls; and providing employment to women, paving the way to economic and social empowerment. An enabling environment is created for pregnant girls to continue their education.

3. Gender budgeting with special attention to the girl child has been given importance in the following areas: improvement of school infrastructures, regular health checkups, reduction in gender gaps in literacy and wages, cash transfer schemes for the registration of the girl child, immunizations, school enrolment and retention, and enforcement of the minimum age for marriage. Scholarships are available for tertiary education. Some of the other programmes considered under gender budgeting relate to "bridge schools" providing quality education packages to the girl child, in particular to street children, child labourers, and children of sex workers; nutrition programmes for seasonal migrant girls; awareness campaigns to provide education and training on gender issues; compulsory registration of pregnancies and births; and cash certificates for the girl child born and registered in a family below the poverty line as a financial support to the family at the time of the girl's marriage.

4. Legislation regarding child labour in all its forms, child marriage, sexual exploitation, sex determination and trafficking has been enacted. Offices have been established for the advancement of women.

5. Effective practices also include creating enabling environments for girls to participate in decisions that affect their lives. Neighbourhood Children's Parliaments

¹ *Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 2007, Supplement No. 7 (E/2007/27)*, chap. I, sect. A.

bring together girls and boys in small groups at neighbourhood level, enhancing gender equality and better lives for all.

Implementation gaps

6. The *Human Development Report 2010* of the United Nations Development Programme states that the disadvantages facing women and girls are a major source of inequality and that all too often women and girls are discriminated against in health, education and the labour market with negative repercussions on their freedoms. It also brings out the fact that gender inequality varies tremendously across countries. The *2010 Trafficking in Persons Report*, recently published by the United States State Department, emphasizes that trafficking is a fluid phenomenon responding to market demands, weakness in laws and penalties, and economic and development disparities, and that more people are trafficked for forced labour than for commercial sex.

7. The organization is aware of the numerous stories of struggling women and girls, narrated by Nicholas D. Kristof and Sheryl WuDunn (Half the Sky movement). The following are some of the stories narrated by women and girls during the group discussions. These stories are the tip of the iceberg of the struggles faced by women and girls across the world. They reveal the existing gap between the commitments made in the agreed conclusions on the elimination of all forms of discrimination and violence against the girl child and the implementation of those commitments:

- Lima, 16 years of age, was promised a job; the employer sexually abused her and threatened to kill her if she were to let others know about the abuse; the girl later became sick and died
- Doris, a 12-year-old adolescent, was forced into child labour due to poverty at home; she was expelled from the job when she reported that the employer was sexually abusing her
- Girls in schools were promised question papers ahead of exams if they allow themselves to be sexually exploited by the teachers
- Women and girls are promised employment in other countries and are forced into brothels as prostitutes
- Girls going into prostitution are exploited by the perpetrators from other countries, for pornography, even to have sex with dogs
- Girls were asked by their families to have multiple jobs like selling things in the market and as domestic workers for minimum wages
- Becoming sex workers is not an option for many girls as it is their livelihood to earn money for school fees, to meet basic needs and support their families
- Patients in need of medical care in hospitals are expected to bring the basic needs such as bed sheets, pillows, blankets, needles, gloves, buckets, money to purchase medicines

8. The group discussions also brought out the fact that while pressure groups in developed countries lobby governments on matters such as trafficking and equal opportunity for women and girls, sweat shops exploit the labour of migrant groups, especially women and girls, to produce low-priced goods, and the sex industry is

able to hide the existence of trafficked workers. Girls living in rural and remote areas are more disadvantaged and are vulnerable to domestic violence and sexual exploitation.

9. The fifty-first session of the Commission on the Status of Women encouraged the Committee on the Rights of the Child and the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, as well as all human rights treaty bodies, to invite States parties to ensure that their reports explicitly address the situation of the girl child. The Commission also called for the United Nations country team to strengthen their advocacy at the country level and their technical capacities to address all forms of discrimination and violence against the girl child. In spite of the many efforts, the stories told by the girls during the group discussions speak to us of the vast implementation gap.

Recommendations

10. The organization therefore recommends that Governments and the international community:

- Create enabling environments to promote universal participation of girls based on equality of rights and opportunities in order to reduce gender inequality.
- Give attention to the multidimensional poverty when investing in policies and programmes for girls. In the publication of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs entitled *Report on the World Social Situation 2010: Rethinking Poverty*, it is stated that poverty is deprivation of one's ability to live as a free and dignified human being with the full potential to achieve one's desired goal in life.
- Collaborate with the civil society organizations to accelerate progress to end discrimination and violence against the girl child, and to empower them.
- Mandate the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women) to ensure enforcement of the existing legal instruments in favour of girls.

The real hope for greater progress is the priority theme of the fifty-fifth session of the Commission "Access and participation of women and girls to education, training, science and technology, including for the promotion of women's equal access to full employment and decent work" and the creation of the new entity UN Women.